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Surimi: Status and prospects

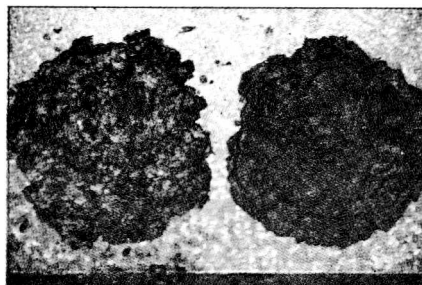
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Surimi: status and prospects



Minced sardine meat

Surimi, minced fish meat, is a raw material for a wide array of convenient food to the delight of time-pressed but health-conscious consumers.

Although the *surimi* industry has spread around the world, Japan still remains the world's largest producer and consumer.

Consumption is usually focused on four major product forms, namely:

- *chikuwa* - tube-shaped fish paste;
- *kamaboko* - boiled fish paste;
- *satsumaage* - fried fish paste product;

and

- *hampen* - floating-type boiled fish paste.

Although total household expenditure on *surimi* has not grown at all, those for some products like *kamaboko* has increased slightly. In addition to the traditional products, *kanikama* or artificial crab legs has been developed during the past decade. The growth in the *kanikama* market has not been as much as previously anticipated, with consumers always preferring real crab to imitation if the real one is available. New products include cheese sandwiched by *hampen*; easy-to-eat *kamaboko*; *satsuma-age* with *hampen* taste; squid-*surimi kamaboko* and hi-tech *kanikama* - all of which are selling well.

The development of Alaska pollock *surimi* fueled the Japanese *surimi* industry. Domestic production plus imports peaked at 509 000 tons in 1987 but declined thereafter due to shortages in pollock supply and the development and growth in other markets such as the Republic of Korea and USA.

The *surimi* situation is summarized as follows:

(1) Total supply for 1992 is expected to be 120 000 - 130 000 tons of pollock and 30 000 tons of others such as Atka mackerel and fall salmon.

(2) USA is the major on-board *surimi* supplier for Japan. Imports of Alaska pollock

surimi in 1991 was at 75 000-85 000 tons. In addition, hake *surimi* produced off Washington and Oregon states in the USA was about 20 000 tons.

(3) The USSR is another source of pollock *surimi*. A Japan-USSR joint-venture company is producing *surimi* in the USSR waters: 6378 tons in 1990 and an estimated 5000 tons in 1991.

(4) Hoki *surimi* from New Zealand has decreased from 17 000-19 000 tons in 1990 to 8000 tons in 1991 due to declining resources and a growing demand for fillets.

(5) Southern blue whiting *surimi* from Argentina has increased from 5 820 tons in 1990 to over 10 000 tons in 1991. According to industry sources, the Argentine government may allow more *surimi* trawl vessels to operate in Argentine waters in the future.

In view of the above, *surimi* manufacturers are constantly looking for other new *surimi* sources. Recently, two Japanese companies have obtained exclusive sales contracts of about 6000 tons *surimi* made of Chilean horse mackerel for the Japanese market. Other companies will reportedly engage in similar ventures in Chile. So far almost all *surimi* raw materials are cold water species. One significant exception is *itoyori* or threadfin bream.

The dominant supplier of *itoyori surimi* is Thailand (99.9% of total 1990 imports) which has 9 *surimi*-plants in operation. Thailand also makes block-frozen *surimi* out of various other species such as cods, lizardfish, barracuda, conger eel, wolf herring, croakers, jewfish and shark.

More and more products are entering the market that require new *surimi* materials. With the recent shortage of pollock *surimi*, tropical *surimi* is an attractive alternative.

Source: Ichiro Kano, "Tropical *surimi*," *INFOFISH International*, January-February, 1992.